

## Poverty in the District of Columbia 1970 to 2008

by  
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### Introduction

This report describes how poverty rate varies by age, race, educational attainment, employment status, nativity, and household type in the District of Columbia. Also presented are the poverty threshold for 2008 and determining who is in poverty. The data in this report are based on the 1970 to 2000 decennial censuses and the 2001 to 2008 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

### Poverty in the District of Columbia Since 1970

As indicated in Table 1 and Figure 1, the District of Columbia has experienced fluctuating levels of poverty, both in terms of numbers and rates throughout the period covered in this report. In 1970, there were 123,109 people living in poverty, accounting for a poverty rate of 17.0 percent. By

census 2000, this rate increased to 20.2 percent but with less people in poverty (109,500), given the declining population. By 2002, both the poverty rate (17.5 percent) and the number of people in poverty (93,021) declined again. These fluctuations in the number of people in poverty and in the poverty rate continued through 2007, with the District of Columbia experiencing the lowest number of people in poverty at 91,934, and the lowest poverty rate of 16.4 percent.

In 2008, according to the American Community Survey (ACS), among states and the District of Columbia, poverty rates ranged from 7.6 percent for New Hampshire to 21.2 percent for Mississippi. The District of Columbia's poverty rate (17.2 percent) was higher than the national average poverty rate (13.2 percent) and it was the 5th highest poverty rate in the United States next to

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**Table 1. Number of People in Poverty and Poverty Rate:  
District of Columbia 1970 to 2008**

Year	Total*	Below Poverty Level	
		Number	Percent
2008	561,874	96,769	17.2
2007	559,557	91,934	16.4
2006	551,161	108,100	19.6
2005	513,137	97,617	19.0
2004	515,581	97,525	18.9
2003	527,071	105,050	19.9
2002	532,970	93,021	17.5
2001	534,544	96,543	18.1
2000	541,657	109,500	20.2
1990	570,826	96,278	16.9
1980	610,454	113,356	18.6
1970	724,306	123,109	17.0

\*Total refers to the number of people in the poverty universe (not the total population).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970 to 2000 Censuses, and 2001 to 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).



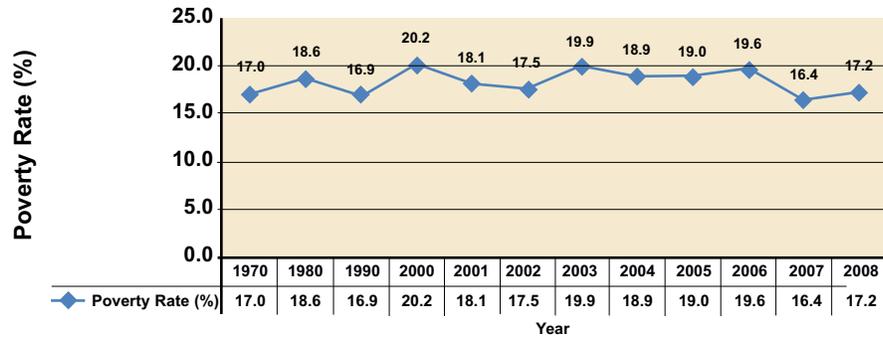
Mississippi (21.2 percent), Arkansas (17.3 percent), Kentucky (17.3 percent), and Louisiana (17.3 percent).

### Poverty Rate by Age and Sex

Poverty rate varies by age and sex in the District of Columbia. As presented in Table 2, children under 18 years in the District of Columbia were more likely to live in poverty than other age groups. In 2008, 25.9 percent of children under 18 years of age were in poverty, compared with 15.1 percent of people between 18 to 64 years, and 15.2 percent of people 65 years and over. In 2000, rates were much higher with 31.7 percent of children under 18 years in poverty, 17.4 percent of persons 18 to 64 years, and 16.4 percent of persons 65 years and over.

In 2008, the District of Columbia's child poverty rate was the second highest child poverty rate in the United States next to Mississippi (30.4 percent). The District of Columbia's child poverty rate (25.9 percent) in 2008 was higher than the national child poverty rate (18.2 percent). Poverty rate for children under 18 years old in the District of Columbia decreased by 5.8 percentage points from 31.7 percent in 2000 to 25.9 percent in 2008, compared with 2.3 point reduction for people 18 to 64 years, and 1.2 for people 65 years and older.

Figure 1. Poverty Rates: District of Columbia 1970-2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 2 also shows poverty rate by sex. In 2008, 15.7 percent of males in the District of Columbia were in poverty, compared with 18.6 percent of females. The poverty rate of males changed by 3.2 percentage point between 2000 and 2008 compared with 2.8 percentage points for females.

Asian population which saw a decline from 22.8 percent in 2000 to 12.8 percent in 2008 (Table 3, Figure 2).

### Poverty Rate by Race and Hispanic Origin

Poverty rate varies by race and ethnicity in the District of Columbia. In 2008, 23.6 percent of Blacks or African Americans had income below the poverty level, compared with 8.1 percent of Whites and 12.8 percent of Asians. Hispanics or Latinos had a 17.6 percent poverty rate in 2008. The largest decrease in the poverty rate by race between 2000 and 2008 was the

### Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment

Poverty rates are inversely proportional to educational attainment. The higher a person's level of education, the less likely are they to be living in poverty. In 2008 in the District of Columbia, the poverty rate for persons 25 years and over who were less than high school graduates was 32.5 percent, compared to high school graduates with a poverty rate of 20.1 percent. Similarly, poverty rate for persons with some college or associate's degree was

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Table 2. Poverty Rate by Age and Sex: District of Columbia 2000-2008

Age and Sex	2008 Below Poverty			2007 Below Poverty			2000 Below Poverty			Percent Change (2000-08)
	Total	Number	%	Total	Number	%	Total	Number	%	
Population for whom poverty status is determined	561,874	96,769	17.2	559,557	91,934	16.4	541,657	109,500	20.2	-3.0
<b>AGE</b>										
Under 18 years	109,538	28,365	25.9	112,200	25,597	22.7	111,535	35,367	31.7	-5.8
18 to 64 years	386,022	58,297	15.1	380,055	57,169	15.0	363,644	63,246	17.4	-2.3
65 years and over	66,314	10,107	15.2	66,823	9,168	13.7	66,478	10,887	16.4	-1.2
<b>SEX</b>										
Male	264,815	41,576	15.7	261,429	38,519	14.7	254,044	48,047	18.9	-3.2
Female	297,059	55,193	18.6	298,128	53,415	17.9	287,613	61,453	21.4	-2.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000, and 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 3. Poverty Rate by Race and Hispanic Origin:  
District of Columbia 2000-2008**

Race and Hispanic Origin	2008 Below Poverty			2007 Below Poverty			2000 Below Poverty			Percent Change (2000-08)
	Total	Number	%	Total	Number	%	Total	Number	%	
White	204,695	16,525	8.1	196,396	15,157	7.7	160,269	14,907	9.3	-1.2
Black	305,844	72,331	23.6	309,349	70,132	22.7	330,138	84,098	25.5	-1.9
Asian	18,808	2,412	12.8	16,423	1,794	10.9	13,602	3,098	22.8	-10.0
Hispanic (any race)	49,485	8,693	17.6	48,107	5,317	11.1	43,789	8,968	20.5	-2.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000, and 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

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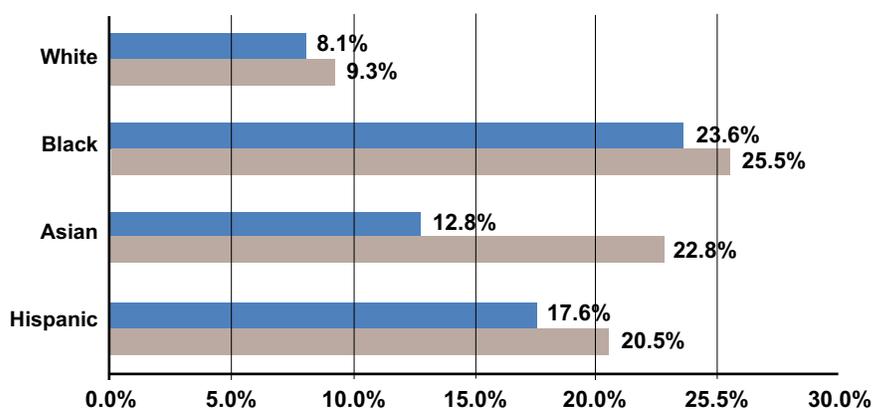
13.1 percent, compared to persons with a Bachelor's degree or higher at a poverty rate of 4.6 percent. Poverty rates for 2007 showed a similar pattern.

**Poverty Rate by Employment Status**

As expected, people who worked full-time, year-round were almost never living in poverty. In 2008, 2.0 percent of the District of Columbia's population who worked full-time, year-round were living in poverty. The poverty rate among people

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**Figure 2. Poverty Rates By Race and Ethnicity:  
District of Columbia 2000-2008**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Table 4. Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over:  
District of Columbia 2007 and 2008**

Educational Attainment	Total	2008 Below Poverty Level		Total	2007 Below Poverty Level		Percent Change (2007 – 08)
		Number	%		Number	%	
Population 25 years and over	396,272	51,620	13.0	391,866	51,705	13.2	-0.2
Less than high school graduate	55,087	17,909	32.5	54,148	16,288	30.1	2.4
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	77,559	15,595	20.1	83,374	16,523	19.8	0.3
Some college, associate's degree	69,784	9,133	13.1	64,770	10,153	15.7	-2.6
Bachelor's degree or higher	193,842	8,983	4.6	189,574	8,741	4.6	0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

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who worked part-time or part-year was 21.7 percent, still lower than the population who did not work at all with a poverty rate of 34.9 percent (Table 5).

**Poverty Rate by Household Type**

In 2008, 15.4 percent of households in the District of Columbia had incomes below the poverty level (Table 6). Family households were less likely to live in poverty than nonfamily households. In 2008, 13.7 percent of family households were in poverty, compared with 16.7 per-

cent of nonfamily households. Among family households, married-couple family households were less likely to be in poverty (3.9 percent) than other family households (23.7 percent). Among other family households, male householders, no wife present were less likely to be in poverty (10.1%) than female householders, no husband present (26.9 percent).

Poverty rate for male householders, no wife present increased significantly (2.7 percentage points) between 2007 and 2008, compared with 0.6 percentage points for married-couple families. Poverty rate remained unchanged (26.9 percent) between 2007 and 2008, for

female householders, no husband present (Table 6).

**Poverty Status by Nativity**

Poverty rate varies by nativity in the District of Columbia. Poverty rates are higher for the native-born population when compared to the foreign-born population. In 2008, 17.4 percent of the native-born population was in poverty, compared with 16.2 percent of the foreign-born. However, while there was a 3.5 percent increase in the poverty rate for the for-

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**Table 5. Poverty Rate by Employment Status for Population 16 Years and Over: District of Columbia 2007 and 2008**

Educational Attainment	Total	2008 Below Poverty Level		Total	2007 Below Poverty Level		Percent Change (2007 – 08)
		Number	%		Number	%	
All workers 16 years and Over	464,334	71,630	15.4	458,962	69,695	15.2	-0.2
Worked part-time or part-year	323,796	4,700	2.0	203,481	2,961	1.5	0.5
Worked full-time, year-round	105,144	22,812	21.7	127,507	22,884	17.9	3.8
Did not work	126,394	44,118	34.9	127,974	43,850	34.3	0.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 6. Poverty Rate by Household Type: District of Columbia 2007 and 2008**

	2008 Below Poverty			2007 Below Poverty			2006 Below Poverty			Percent Change (2007 – 08)
	Total	Number	%	Total	Number	%	Total	Number	%	
Households	249,996	38,563	15.4	251,039	36,840	14.7	248,590	42,522	17.1	-1.7
Family households	107,365	14,675	13.7	108,181	14,098	13.0	115,963	19,365	16.7	-3.0
Married-couple family	54,439	2,125	3.9	55,790	1,841	3.3	58,050	3,336	5.7	-1.8
Other family	52,926	12,550	23.7	52,391	12,257	23.4	57,913	16,029	27.7	
Male household, no wife present	9,943	1,004	10.1	9,434	701	7.4	10,355	1,757	17.0	-4.0
Female household, no husband present	42,983	11,546	26.9	42,957	11,556	26.9	47,558	14,272	30.0	-6.9
Nonfamily households	142,631	23,888	16.7	142,858	22,742	15.9	132,627	23,157	17.5	-0.8
Male householder	65,026	9,818	15.1	65,904	9,656	14.7	61,049	9,897	16.2	-1.1
Female householder	77,605	14,070	18.1	76,954	13,086	17.0	71,578	13,260	18.5	-0.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

eign-born between 2007 and 2008, the rate for the native-born only increases by 0.4 percent. Among the foreign-born population in 2008, those who were not citizens of the United States experienced higher rates of poverty (16.7 percent) than those who were naturalized citizens (15.3 percent). This holds true for 2007 as well.

**Determining Who is in Poverty**

The US Census Bureau uses a set of dollar value thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty (see Table 8 for 2008 Poverty Thresholds). If a family's total income is less than the dollar value of the appropriate threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty. Similarly, if an unrelated individ-

ual's total income is less than the appropriate threshold, then that individual is considered to be in poverty. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated annually to allow for changes in the cost of living (inflation factor) using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In 2008 for example, the poverty threshold for a single person living alone

**Table 7. Poverty Status of the Native and Foreign-born Population by Nativity: District of Columbia 2007 and 2008**

Nativity	Total	2008 Below Poverty Level		Total	2007 Below Poverty Level		Percent Change (2007 – 08)
		Number	%		Number	%	
Population for whom poverty status is determined	561,874	96,76	17.2	188,703	91,934	16.4	0.8
Native	486,395	84,555	17.4	167,423	82,868	17.0	0.4
Foreign born	75,479	12,214	16.2	21,280	9,066	12.7	3.5
Naturalized citizen	26,833	4,109	15.3	7,288	3,179	12.3	3.0
Not a citizen	48,646	8,105	16.7	13,992	5,887	12.9	3.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 8. Poverty Thresholds in 2008 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years (Dollars)**

Size of Family Unit	Weighted average thresholds	Related children under 18 years								
		None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight or more
One person (unrelated individual)	\$10,991									
Under 65 years	11,201	11,201								
65 years and over	10,326	10,326								
Two people	14,051									
Householder under 65 years	14,489	14,417	14,840							
Householder 65 years and over	13,030	13,014	14,784							
Three people	17,163	16,841	17,330	17,346						
Four people	22,025	22,207	22,570	21,834	21,910					
Five people	26,049	26,781	27,170	26,338	25,694	25,301				
Six people	29,456	30,803	30,925	30,288	29,677	28,769	28,230			
Seven people	33,529	35,442	35,664	34,901	34,369	33,379	32,223	30,955		
Eight people	37,220	39,640	39,990	39,270	38,639	37,744	36,608	35,426	35,125	
Nine people or more	44,346	47,684	47,915	47,278	46,743	45,864	44,656	43,563	43,292	41,624

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

was \$10,991; for a two-person family, \$14,051; for a family consisting of one adult and two children, it was \$17,346; and for two adults and two children, it was \$21,834.

To determine whether someone is in poverty, their total family income is compared with the poverty threshold appropriate for that person's family size and composition. If the total income of the family is less than the threshold, then the person and every member of the family is considered to be in poverty. Poverty status was determined for all people except institutionalized people, people in military group quarters, people in college dormitories, and unrelated individuals under 15 years old.

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